

GREAT WEST VIRGINIA PREACHER SERIES

BISHOP URBAN V. W. DARLINGTON

By J. A. Earl, A.B., S.T.B.



A HUNTINGTON BISHOP
WITH HIS OFFICE IN HIS HAT

A HUNTINGTON BISHOP WITH OFFICE IN HIS HAT

By J. A. Earl

Bishop Darlington won fame and favor on both sides of the Atlantic while living in Huntington. His niche in American Church History is unique. Huntington is indebted to him for building the largest Protestant Church in the city - Johnson Memorial. His last forty years were spent here. Since he belonged to the traveling ministry, someone asked him this pertinent question: "Why have you lived in Huntington so long?"

The Bishop replied with his twinkle: "I think it may be the convenience of natural gas."

Born on a farm in Shelby County, Kentucky, August 3, 1870, he began earning his living at eight years of age. The youngest of twelve children, he left his "old Kentucky home" and came to Huntington at thirty-nine years of age.

When asked why he was named Urban Valentine Williams Darlington, he answered: "There were so many children by the time I arrived that my parents ran out of ordinary names and named me for the family doctor."

The revival meeting in which Bishop Darlington was converted at fifteen years of age was reported by the preacher with some measure of disappointment. He said: "We did not have a very good meeting. The attendance was good, but nobody was converted except old Susie So-and-so (a familiar neighborhood character who got converted at every annual revival) and little Urb Darlington." Urb was the janitor of the church.

U. V. W. Darlington studied in Kentucky Wesleyan College but did not graduate. In 1896 he joined the Kentucky Conference. His first appointment was the Washington-East Maysville Circuit. The next year he was given a small station in Washington. Three years later his assignment was Millersburg for one year. Subsequently he went to Scott Street Church in Covington (All in Kentucky).

A son of James Henderson, a farmer, and Kitty Pennington Darlington, the Bishop married Lyda Clarke at Millersburg, October 29, 1901. They had two children, Lyda Clarke

and Urban V. W., Jr. Mrs. Darlington died in 1911. On February 12, 1913 he married Virginia Bourne of Stanford, Ky. She was a music teacher in Marshall College, Huntington and to them were born Kitty Scott and Julian Truehart.

Transferring to the Western Virginia Conference in 1905, he served the important St. Paul's Church in Parkersburg for the four year limit, 1905-09. St. Paul's history says: "Under Darlington's leadership the church was more prosperous in every way than it had ever been." He organized Stephenson Memorial, Parkersburg, with twenty-eight members.

His next appointment was Johnson Memorial Church, Huntington. Here he built a new building and the largest church in the conference. It is the largest in membership now of any church in Huntington, a city with almost a thousand more Methodists than any city in West Virginia.

After four years at Johnson Memorial he spent five years in three offices: Conference Secretary of Education, Presiding Elder of the Ashland District and President of Morris Harvey College.

At the Atlanta General Conference in 1918 Darlington was elected Bishop. Bishop U.V.W. Darlington's areas included North and South Carolina; Illinois, Kentucky and West Virginia; Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia in Europe; the Memphis Area and the Louisville Area until he retired in 1944. During his retirement he served the Mississippi Area, 1946-49, due to the death of Bishop Decell in 1940.

Bishop Darlington was honored with the D. D. and LL. D. degrees and attended the Ecumenical Conference in Toronto in 1911, and 1921 in London, England. Among many other positions he was president of the Board of Trustees of Paine (Negro) College, Augusta, Georgia and trustee of Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

West Virginia's adopted Bishop preached salvation by grace through faith in this world and the next. He would say to his congregation: "If you do not get anything else from this service, get what I am reading from the Bible."

Bishop Short's pen-picture of Darlington's preaching is a valuable contribution to the history of American preaching.

"Those who know the Bishop best know that above all else, he was a Gospel preacher. He loved to preach, and when he preached, he preached with power. His messages had simple content, but they rang the changes on the great fundamental notes of the Christian faith. His preaching had about it a strong emotional appeal, and he moved his audience to both tears and laughter. One invariably felt that he himself was always a part of his message. James (v:17 marg.) observed that "Elisha prayed in his prayers." One may likewise say that Bishop Darlington preached in his preaching. His sermons were always Bible - rooted discourses, for the most part upon passages in the Gospels, in Acts, in Psalms, and in the historical books of the Old Testament. Among the many times I have heard him preach, I never heard him tackle a passage from the epistles. His reading of the Scriptures was unusually effective, and he always made their sacred pages live. He was gifted with an unusual voice and he used its rich range and inflections, together with the expression of his face to give dramatic meaning to the passage read in a way that few men seem to be able to do. Primarily he was an evangelistic preacher. The hortatory note was forever present in his sermons and he delighted to call sinners to repentance and numbered his converts by thousands."

"Bishop Darlington," says Short regarding his episcopacy, "belonged to the old South. Its blood was in his veins and its one day pattern of thinking was his pattern of thinking. Methodist Information, in its releases to the church press a few weeks ago, described him as a "typical old-fashioned Southern Bishop;" and so he was. Among the Southern Bishops in the College as it was constituted in the days of his active labors he belonged to the conservative wing. He felt a natural kinship to such episcopal colleagues as Bishop Candler, Bishop Denny, Bishop Ainsworth, and Bishop Dickey, and they felt a natural kinship to him. In 1925, when the vote upon the first plan of Methodist Union came, he was one of the five Bishops of the Church, South who was active in opposition to it. In 1939, he accepted the idea of union, but it would scarcely be accurate to affirm that he was enthusi-

astically for it. In the later years of his life he was much like the last leaf upon the tree in the spring, and with his going a long chapter in the life of the church in the southern section of the country is brought to a close as now the last member of a small, like-minded, closely-knit, group of episcopal leaders which once towered mightily in the church of the South has passed on to join the others in the Father's House.

"As an episcopal administrator, the Bishop operated according to the old pattern in the Church, South. He maintained his home in Huntington, West Virginia, and from there he cared for the conferences which the church assigned him in the Carolinas, in Kentucky, in Southern Illinois, and in Europe. When, with the advent of union, the Area system came to the southern section of the country, he made only partial adjustment to it. In the old Church Extension building at Louisville there is in the cloak room a certain peg on which he regularly hung his hat whenever he came to town. He would sometimes touch it affectionately and with a quiet smile say, "This is my episcopal residence." He did not live in his area, he did not even live in The Southeastern Jurisdiction of which he was the senior Bishop, for Huntington is over the line in the Northeastern Jurisdiction. But he did travel his area faithfully and tirelessly.

"In his years as Bishop he never had a secretary. He answered his correspondence promptly, pecking out his letters on an old-fashioned typewriter, and never worrying about carbon copies or such endless details as meticulous filing. After he had written a letter he would then underline in pen and ink what he considered most important. Sometimes his underlining was so full that practically everything in the letter was underlined, with the result that nothing in the letter was actually emphasized.

"In the making of appointments he followed the procedures of an older day, and looked largely to his own counsel, though he showed every kindness and consideration to his cabinets. The element of surprise loomed largely in his appointment making and no one was ever entirely sure what was going to happen until the final reading of the appointments was completed. Under this system there was, of course, no question in

the Conferences which he held of sustained interest upon the part of both preachers and laymen until the final benediction was said.

"His method of holding a Conference was all his own. His morning devotionals were spiritual feasts. As he dispatched the business of the conference, he salted his presiding with just enough wit and humor to give flavor to even the most prosaic proceedings. He loved to sing, and often he would lead the Conference in song. His rich tenor voice, when he let himself go in some rapture of emotion, would lift itself out of the singing of the group and make those who heard it wonder once again at the marvel of a faith that sets the soul and lips of man singing the praise of redeeming love. Whatever else may be said of his administration, it may be said that he made his conferences spiritual experiences for those in attendance.

"One of his chief assets as an administrator was that he always knew his preachers. Reference to this recalls for me the first time that, as a boy preacher, I was introduced to him on the streets of a little town where the Conference was in session. He was walking along the street in company with my presiding elder, and I was walking on the other side of the street in the opposite direction. The presiding elder called to me to come across the street. He said, "I want the Bishop to meet you." The Bishop reached out, took my hand, and to my utter surprise said with a smile, "Is this Roy?" Such was my own introduction to what later I saw verified endless times, the fact that he had his men identified, even the youngest of them, and the most limited of them, and was deeply concerned about them."

Bishop Darlington was on the commission that made the hymnal for the new Methodist Church formed in 1939. Opposing Union before it came, his "Magnanimous attitude toward Union as it affected West Virginia was most sportsmanlike," said Bishop E.H. Hughes of Moundsville.

When Darlington was to preside at the Uniting Conference, he spent the better part of the previous night on his knees. The great Conference was so plagued with reporters in Darlington's opinion that he asked permission to sing a solo. When he sang:

"In Heaven above
Where all is love
There'll no reporters there," he received prolonged applause.

Bishop Darlington's unique personality made a tremendous impression upon Uniting Conference. There was a depth of emotion when he bade farewell on behalf of the American body to the fraternal delegates of British Methodism - Dr. Robert Bond and Sir Isaac Foote. All three of these men are tall, and Bishop Darlington called Dr. Bond to his right hand, and Sir Isaac Foote to his left. He took each of their hands, and them standing thus, he addressed them for the Conference:

"You have won our respect, but far more than that, you have won our hearts, our affections. We love you for what you have said, but far beyond that we love you for what you are. You are the sons of Wesley. We hope we are. You can teach us much....we shall be the richer after this is all over."

A fellow townsman, Colonel George S. Wallace in his Cabell County History says: "Bishop Darlington is a man's man - an unusual personality. His sympathies are easily enlisted and anyone in trouble finds him not only a sympathetic friend but one who will do all that is humanly possible to lighten the burden."

His humor is seen in his blasting the theory that chicken was the food of all visiting Methodist clergymen:

"I've eaten enough potato salad to sink a ship." However, he estimated that his chicken consumption would be sufficient to stock an oversized poultry farm.

Bishop F. J. McConnell and Bishop U.V.W. Darlington were as different as any two Bishops, but they were friends. McConnell wrote Darlington on his eightieth birthday:

"I rejoice in your many years and what you have done with them. I think of you many times as the days go by and always with gratitude. You have had your own ideas and you have heroically held fast to them. There is something inspiring in the way you walk, and speak and act toward your fellowmen. It is a joy to think of you and I wish you the very best of the best things." Francis J.

McConnell.

Six famous sayings of Darlington:

"Christ alone can satisfy the soul. Europe needs soup, soap and salvation. A church without proper institutions misses its most wholesome function and cannot continue to exist. Book reviews, nice little essays, and lectures may entertain...but it all will very soon evaporate. Prayer only opens Heaven. No nation or man has been great or ever will be without suffering."

THE SEVEN DISTINCTIVE DEEDS OF DARLINGTON

1. He was a college president and Bishop without an earned degree.

2. He was the only Bishop to serve on a draft board.

3. He was the only president of Methodist college to live in the college while president. His second son was born in the Morris Harvey Dorm, the part of the dorm that used to be the county jail.

4. He was president of the first Jurisdictional Conference; the new Jurisdictional Conference has elected all American Methodist Bishops since 1939.

5. He was the only Bishop of this century to have his office in his hat.

6. He was the last Bishop who made appointments without consulting his cabinet.

7. He lived in Huntington longer after his election to the episcopacy than any other Methodist Bishop ever lived in one city. He lived in Huntington forty years. Mrs. Darlington resides at 524 10th Avenue in Huntington.

A man of sorrows, Bishop Darlington expressed his grief in the Christian Advocate July 27, 1939:

"It was midnight and the first day of June was fast approaching. The place was Bethesda Hospital, Cincinnati, Ohio. A good man, Dr. Frank Nelson of Christ Church in that city, had watched the skillful hands of a good surgeon as he worked to save a daughter's life. Her devoted mother was by her side and remained for the next ten days of prayerful and watchful waiting.

"They were painful and anxious days. All was done that could be done, but in spite of all, the poison did its work and the angels claimed her. She passed into that

great beyond.

"She was thirty-six years of age, beautiful in face and form and possessed a voice that in song had comforted and helped many poor struggling souls. She was my own child. We called her Lyda Clarke, and I hope the angels will call her by that same beloved name.

"A dear good soul has passed. I feel like an old tree standing out in the field that has been struck many times by lightning and the last bolt has shattered me, but I am still standing. My face is toward the sunrise and with good hope I face the future."

Bishop Short describes Bishop Darlington's sorrows:

"He knew what it was to walk a mile with sorrow. During the last war there came to him the shock of losing his oldest son and namesake in the Far East and then later he and his wife received from the intelligence that their youngest son was also missing in action. For long months they lived through the agonizing experience of not knowing whether the lad was dead or alive until at last the welcome news came that while his plane had been shot down, he himself was safe and a prisoner in Bulgaria. Likewise, the familiar burden and responsibilities of the episcopal office oftentimes brought suffering to Bishop Darlington. They were never easy for him. The care of all the churches weighed heavily upon his heart and frequently he found the making of decisions difficult. Amid all that life and office brought, however, he bore himself with strength and patience for he knew experimentally where the living fountain of water is, of which if a man may drink, he will find a strength not his own which is made perfect in his weakness."

Another Kentuckian, Bishop Roy H. Short was ordained as a boy by Bishop Darlington and served twice in his cabinet. Bishop Short's personal experiences and associations with Bishop Darlington caused him to look upon Darlington as "my Bishop." We conclude with a profile by Bishop Short, his memoirs on Darlington to the Council of Bishops in November 1954. (All quotes from Short used by permission although they are not copyrighted):

"A simple little white church sits beside a heavily traveled highway in Kentucky. It is surrounded by a grove of trees with a little God's Acre behind where the fore fathers of the hamlet sleep. There on an early June day in 1944 a large company of Kentuckians from throughout the state gathered for a simple but eloquently moving ceremony. There were present prominent business men and humble dirt farmers. There were preachers serving almost every conceivable type of appointment from the highest steeple churches to the poorest country circuits. There were humble housewives and gifted women who were recognized leaders in church and civic affairs. There were members of the supreme bench of the state, and even the governor of the state himself was there.

"The service began in the morning, was interrupted by an old-fashioned dinner on the grounds at noon, and then continued on until late afternoon. The purpose of the occasion was to give Kentucky Methodists an opportunity to pay a warm tribute of respect and love to a man who had been born among their hills, who had been schooled in their institutions, who preached effectively in their churches and who for fourteen years had been their much loved episcopal leader, and who in a few weeks at the coming Jurisdictional Conference was scheduled for retirement.

"The committee planning for the occasion had debated at length on plans for some appropriate recognition of his long service in the church. Numerous ideas had been suggested, such as a banquet at some large hotel or a recognition service in one of the leading churches of the area, but at last the conclusion was reached that nothing could be more appropriate than a general gathering of Methodists from all over Kentucky at the Grafenburg Church that had been the Bishop's home church, where as a child his steps had been set in the path that leads to God, and where his father and mother and other members of the Darlington family had long rested in the quiet of the churchyard.

"It was in this church where Bishop Darlington had been converted as a boy during a revival.

"All of us who were present in that

little country church that day could not fail to see the essential fitness of the occasion as a way to honor the aging Bishop, for he was, and always has been a man of the people. He came from among the plain people. He understood the plain people and loved them and they in turn respected and loved him.

(The community placed a marker by the Grafenberg Church with these words on it:

"Bishop U. V. W. Darlington
Able Administrator
Inspirational Preacher.")

"Bishop Darlington's great loves were his church, his family and pleasant home in Huntington, toward which from traveling in far places he always turned his weary footsteps with such eagerness of heart, and his native state of Kentucky whose traditions were so largely a part of him. We Methodists of Kentucky loved him, and we shall be forever grateful for his spiritual contribution to our lives.

"Bishop Darlington would never say goodbye. For some strange reason he would not allow that word to escape his lips. Rather, on any occasion of parting, he would grasp one's hand and say, "I will see you again." So those of us who knew him and labored with him in the Gospel rejoice that at last he has entered the glad haven toward which his footsteps moved so faithfully and for so long, and in full confidence and assurance as we realize that he has now gone on, we say his own familiar words, "I will see you again."

He went from Huntington to his Heavenly Home October 1, 1954 and his body was laid to rest at Frankfort, Kentucky.